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ABSTRACT

In order to develop a curriculum especially for educable mentally retarded students at the high school level, this federally funded 1-year research project aimed to establish unique parameters involved in vocational adjustment for these students and to develop a tentative curriculum with this information. A literature review was conducted, and a research team interviewed supervisors, vocational counselors, students, former students, parents, employers, and teachers, collecting data from seven areas in Mississippi. A lack of adequate data for formulating appropriate vocational education curriculums for the mentally handicapped indicated a need for course development. A curriculum model was organized and learning activities developed around these three major areas: (1) the psychomotor domain, (2) social maturity, and (3) environmental factors. The research reports of this project are available as VT 018 484 and VT 018 485 in this issue. (AG)

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Conducted Under Part C
of Public Law 90--576

FINAL REPORT

DEVELOPMENT OF A VOCATIONAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM FOR THE HIGH SCHOOL EDUCABLE MENTALLY RETARDED

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1

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Final Report

DEVELOPMENT OF A VOCATIONAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM FOR THE HIGH SCHOOL EDUCABLE MENTALLY RETARDED

Research Project in Vocational Education
Conducted Under
Part C of Public Law 90-576

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SUMMARY

Time Period - October 1, 1971, to June 30, 1972

Objectives - To develop a curriculum for educational use especially for the high school retarded. At present, little work has been done in this area. The goal of this project was to build curricula areas around the specific parameters involved in vocational matter that appeared unique, or otherwise crucial, for the retarded.

Procedure - The plan followed was to make a review of the literature and demonstration projects, and critique interview data collected from seven areas in Mississippi. Reviews were made by searching through ERIC documents, guides, books, reports, and previous data collected by author. Interview data was collected by utilizing a research team in on-sight locations in which vocational counselors, students, former students, parents, employers, and teachers were interviewed. All data was collected into one volume.

Results - The data disseminated resulted in two volumes of work. One volume is attached to this report as a Research Monograph. This Monograph reports the data leading up to the development of a tentative curriculum. It covers that data retrieved described under Procedures. Basically, the information we received seemed to fall into three broad areas; that data concerned with social maturity, information surrounding the psycho-motor domain, and those indices involved in the environment.

The second volume, also attached to this report, is the curriculum developed by this research team. It is an outgrowth of the specific parameters found in the first volume.

Conclusions and Recommendations - It is felt that the results of this research clearly indicated the ability of specifically stating parameters related to vocational adjustment of the retarded. It is believed these are stated as practical as possible in the body of Volume One. Unfortunately, the usefulness of the Second Volume will not be known unless some feed back information may be obtained from those using it. It is at this point where the author of the research is most disappointed. The original plan was for an eighteen month project. This, however, was cut back to twelve months, and necessitated that all energy be directed toward completion of a tentative curriculum. It will not have the advantage of field testing or feedback of information, however, the author will attempt this.

PART II

Report Summary

The purpose of this project is to develop a vocational education high school curriculum guide for the educable mentally retarded. Previous investigations by Plue (1965) suggested that there was a need to collect specific parameters which might influence vocational decisions and academic procedures in relation to selected curricular elements in learning areas for the educable mentally retarded.

A comprehensive review of the current literature revealed several research studies which could be supplemented by descriptive research techniques using personnel and resources of the Special Education Department of the University of Southern Mississippi. Under the broad term of occupational education common elements were defined which dealt with obtaining, maintaining, and advancing in a job (Douglas, 1944). Vocational education, rehabilitation, work skills, work studies, and employment knowledge were among titles from which data were gathered.

An evaluation of the research and descriptive studies provided evidence indicating that useful information related to vocational pursuits, could determine successful or even adequate curricular elements for EMR's, was unavailable. Engel (1952), for instance, noted that the EMR had very little use for academic skills other than for filling out application blanks and for reading posters and notices. She, however, felt that the school should give the fundamental requirements of living and working. In an attempt to bring together significant research on occupational adjustment, Goldstein (1964) with regard to the reviewed comparative follow-up studies of vocational status, occupations held, mobility, the occupational outlook and occupations and intelligence. His findings suggested that paramount consideration be given to social factors.

Even a cursory review of the literature revealed that there was a paucity of information about the specifics of school programs having vocational education for EMR's and that descriptions of EMR's in their post-school settings were vague and generalized.

Work programs, as presently conceived, are a relatively new type of curriculum plan in schools. Cohen (1964) gave a history of the concept of work programs. He pointed out that these programs were first developed in institutions and retraining was the main purpose. However, the focus

turned to custodial care; and work programs were mainly within the institutions.

A review of the sample high school vocational education curriculum guides and an analysis of selected vocational education topics in ERIC files demonstrated a need to compile adequate data which would formulate a rationale for the development of both behavioral and content aspects of a vocational education curriculum for the mildly retarded.

The study employed the techniques of descriptive analysis to formulate a basic operational format for collection of data. Structured interviews were organized in selected major locations in Mississippi, and a university research team conducted all aspects of the inquiry. Interviewees were supervisors of vocational education programs, counselors, teachers, parents, students, former students, and employers. Interviews were conducted in vocational education offices, client work stations and academic locales.

All interview forms were prepared in advance for each interviewee's classification. The interviewees were seen individually in categorical groups at the conclusion of each visitation in a target city. Data from the interviews were tabulated according to accepted emphisical designs, and an item analysis was conducted in reference to each major factor on the questionaire.

After compiling additional vocational education research information and organizational data, parameters were selected for the vocational education curriculum guide. Experienced personnel in the fields of psychology, curriculum design, and vocational education were consulted; and a model for the curriculum guide was formulated. Experienced curriculum writers were employed to analyze the working copy of the curriculum model and to develop curricular activities in the three major areas selected for the study. These major areas were titled: Psycho-Motor, Social Maturity, and Environmental.

Body of the Report

In establishing curricular objectives, the research team was not guided by any single set of principles or criteria concerning one appropriate method for the inclusion or exclusion of specific objectives. Curriculum choices were determined in light of empirical evidence gathered from the experience of the interviewees, and they were allied to representative expert opinion in the vocational education field. This approach was considered justifiable because it made possible a functional approach to the general problem of curriculum development in terms of significant characteristics or actual difficulties which vocational education personnel face in their work. The empirical approach was practical in that it went beyond some of the generalized suggestions offered in various state and federal curriculum guides and proceeded to consider those special abilities necessary for work success and personal adjustment for the EMR high school population in Mississippi.

Study indicated that not all prescribed levels of attainment could be developed for high school EMR's in each area of academic and personal achievement. The most fruitful approach proved to be through the study of those parameters most closely allied to the actual social, academic, and employment situations of the students. This operational approach may be open to theoretical questioning, however, references from knowledgeable opinion suggests that it was a practical method for arriving at those abilities and skills in vocational education which are needed at the time the EMR student enters a special field of work. For example, it was found that many students understood the "rules" of personal safety as taught in the classroom but that the same students did not recognize the same rules when confronted with an actual problem-solving situation on the job. Thus it was felt that it was necessary to develop specific parameters, objectives, and activities with special emphasis on the real world of work rather than a hypothetical course of study which may or may not pertain to specific employment opportunities and problem-solving situations for the student in Mississippi.

This study was unique, since it endeavored to isolate basic principles and procedures in the vocational education field in order to give the EMR students classroom experience in those aspects of living and work which might form their life patterns. It is recognized, however, that the curriculum guide should be field tested and that, at this point of development, it should be viewed as supplementary to established or contemplated curriculum guides for EMR high school students.

The EMR high school student is faced with a myraid of personal and vocational problems. It became quite evident early in the study that no established guidelines were available to realistically indicate essential parameters for the successful attainment in work or life-adjustment. Therefore, another profitable source for obtaining information and guidelines was demanded. Information was sought in terms of the kinds of experiences vocational education personnel and students utilized in their environment. The extent to which these various sources could be investigated depended somewhat upon the local employment situation and upon the philosphy and skills of the vocational education staffs.

Education in general, and vocational education in particular, in an applied field to which all efforts, whether initially theoretical in concept or technique, must finally find their way into the mainstream of the schools. Vocational education personnel who are responsible for the preparation of EMR students for the world of work are traditionally charged with the maintenance and enhancement of the quality of the vocational education curriculum. Implicit in that responsibility is the need for the rapid transmission of curricular innovations, regardless of the originating source.

Recently both colleged and vocational education departments have begun to take steps to seek a means for enlarging and improving curriculum resources and models. This study was an outgrowth of a series of conferences between vocational education personnel and college representatives over an extended period of time. That this is an appropriate time for the development of fresh ideas and designs for vocational education for EMR students, was agreed on at these meetings. Past research pointed out that vocational education curricular models should be more relevant and flexible in meeting individual needs, more economical in relation to the utilization of personnel and funds, and more innovative in producing curricular choices which foster continuous life-long personal and occupational development.

No single prescribed curriculum is going to meet all the needs of all the students where they are now, and no curriculum can nourish their aptitudes and attitudes for self-enhancement and work orientation. It is hoped that this study will allow for a much greater individualization of the student's learning experience.

The research reports are to be found in separate volumes. For the purposes of this report they may listed as follows:
Appendix A - Research Monograph: Vocational Education for the Educable Mentally Retarded
Appendix B - Vocational Curriculum for the High School EMR.